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## Reinventing Urban Waterfronts Beyond the Urban Core: Public Space and Redevelopment in Squamish and the Vancouver Region

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### *Abstract*

Urban waterfront research has concentrated primarily on the redevelopment of the core areas of major port cities; yet just as cargo handling activities have extended from their traditional core urban port locations into the metropolitan hinterland, urban waterfront redevelopments have spread into smaller and suburban communities. Both processes have occurred without much scholarly attention. In this paper, we trace the implications of waterfront redevelopment processes in smaller suburban communities beyond the urban core. We show how suburban waterfront developments tend to ignore local cultural histories and communities while threatening the values of diversity that might be embraced in all public spaces, regardless of location.

To accomplish this, we provide a case study of waterfront redevelopment and public space formation in the town of Squamish, British Columbia, in comparison to other suburban waterfront redevelopments around the metropolis of Vancouver. Typically, these redevelopments are in communities that used to host significant industrial operations and are now trying to “reinvent” themselves. We identify the limited publics celebrated by, and the constrained forms of publicness created through, contemporary suburban waterfront planning practices. We also pay specific attention to the changing planning discourses that strongly influence the design and marketing of contemporary suburban waterfront communities.

*Keywords:* public space, waterfront, discourse, planning, suburban, Vancouver

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*Résumé*

La recherche sur les fronts d'eau urbains s'est concentrée principalement sur le réaménagement des zones centrales des grandes villes portuaires; cependant, tout comme les activités de manutention du fret se sont étendues de leurs zones portuaires centrales traditionnelles à l'arrière-pays métropolitain, les réaménagements de front d'eau urbain se sont étendus à des communautés plus petites et suburbaines. Les deux processus ont eu lieu sans beaucoup d'attention par les chercheurs. Dans cet article, nous retraçons les implications des processus de réaménagement de front d'eau dans les petites banlieues situées au-delà du noyau urbain. Nous démontrons comment les aménagements de front d'eau en banlieue ont tendance à ignorer les histoires et les communautés culturelles locales tout en menaçant les valeurs de diversité qui pourraient être bien accueillies dans tous les espaces publics, quel que soit leur emplacement.

Pour ce faire, nous fournissons une étude de cas sur le réaménagement de front d'eau et la formation d'espaces publics dans la ville de Squamish, en Colombie-Britannique, par rapport à d'autres réaménagements de front d'eau en banlieue autour de la métropole de Vancouver. Généralement, ces réaménagements se trouvent dans des communautés qui hébergeaient d'importantes activités industrielles et essaient maintenant de se « réinventer ». Nous identifions les publics limités célébrés par les pratiques de planification contemporaines de front d'eau suburbain, ainsi que les formes restreintes de publicité créées par celles-ci. Nous accordons également une attention particulière aux discours changeants en matière de planification qui influencent fortement la conception et la commercialisation des communautés contemporaines de front d'eau en banlieue.

*Mots clés:* espace public, front d'eau, discours, planification, banlieue, Vancouver

**Introduction**

*Squamish is becoming one of Canada's hottest real estate markets with population growth sky-rocketing. People moving to Squamish are young, adventure-driven and professional. (Squamish waterfront, MoveToSquamish, BC 2017).*

The effects of the heated, globalized and financialized real estate market in greater Vancouver, as in many other places, are evident in the region's waterfronts, their redevelopment and marketing. Since the 1970s, formerly industrial waterfront sites have been redeveloped for residential uses, and waterfronts have become sites of experimentation where new forms of public space are being generated. Formerly industrial waterfronts are now understood increasingly as sites of non-industrial activity: “[e]cological, metropolitan commuting or localized pedestrian movements anchored through wetland restoration, riverfront real estate, commercial or parkland development, are now favoured over water-based goods movement” (Hall 2012: 234).

In this paper we identify an emerging urban development pattern regarding public space on rapidly changing suburban and exurban waterfront sites in the Vancouver region. The broader purpose of this research is to understand how waterfront public spaces beyond the urban core are changing, and what consequences these transformations might have beyond individual sites. Such transformations do not happen “naturally”. The creation of public space involves multiple agents, acting in relation to contemporary urban planning and marketing discourses that attempt to (re-)imagine and (re-)make such spaces as appealing for leisure and residential investment. Specific narratives are used to highlight particular conceptions of public space. In this process, certain urban elements are highlighted while others are not, and any “discontinuities” in the desired narratives around a planned waterfront transformation are ignored (see Foucault 1972: 6).

We draw on Foucault (1972) and others to pay attention to the selective narratives and discourses that influence emerging patterns of public space formation on suburban waterfronts. What and whose knowledge gets highlighted, and what and whose knowledge gets ignored? We present the case of proposed waterfront redevelopment in the town of Squamish; here we relied on site visits and analysis of outlined plans and related documentation, since construction has not started at the time of writing. However, we explore the planned changes for Squamish by situating them within a regional context and in relation to other suburban waterfront redevelopments. By doing so, this research suggests the need for planning discourses that encourage more inclusive public spaces on all waterfronts.

We begin by outlining our research strategy, then we review the structural changes that have long been occurring in formerly industrial waterfront cities and their suburbs. We trace how these changes have spread beyond the urban core, as well as the forms of public space now produced at waterfront sites. We then move on to the case study of a new waterfront redevelopment in Squamish, and we ask *how and why is public space on suburban waterfronts being reinvented?* Which uses and users are being precluded and excluded through such spatial reinventions? What processes and trends are leading to the more exclusive public spaces currently being created at these sites? We pay attention to the planning discourses that encourage the creation of such public spaces, as they have the potential to irreversibly sweep away local histories, environments, identities, and diverse ways of life. We then broaden our scope to compare the case of Squamish with other suburban waterfront developments in the region. We end with a discussion and conclusion.

## Approach and evidence

This paper is a continuation of our research on industrial waterfront redevelopment in metropolitan Vancouver, focused initially on the developments along the Fraser River (see Hall and Stern 2014; Airas et al. 2015). Lehrer and Laidley note that waterfront redevelopments allow cities to actively (re-)insert themselves into the global economy, a process that benefits certain social interests at the expense of others (2009: 798). Implicit here is the distinction between who has power and hence whose voice is heard, and whose voices are ignored. As Kenny asserts: *“ultimately the relationship between plan and landscape is an issue of power”* (Kenny 1992: 184), and further, that *“a planning document, possibly more than any other written text, articulates the ideology of dominant groups in the production of the built environment”* (Kenny 1992: 176).

Such power dynamics become evident in the circulation of planning ideas and documents around suburban waterfront reinvention: *“For years urban planning has been understood as a government instrument to rationalize space, populations, and the conduct of residents”* (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017: 512). Nicholls and Uitermark further argue that *“planning conceives and implements the orderly city by imposing lines and rules that render certain activities illicit and others licit.”* This creates divisions between people and activities that will either fit or fail to *“meet dominant norms”* (2017: 512). They draw on Foucault, whose work helps highlight the *“limits, cracks, and resistances in governing orders”* (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017: 515-516; Foucault 1972). Foucault writes that inconsistencies and uncertainties are ignored in the production of documentary material (see 1972: 7), including land use planning and policy documents. As planning attempts to produce a coherent documentation of space, it shapes discourses and decision making in ways that are socially, historically and representationally selective.

The policy mobilities literature guides us to consider how these *“packaged”* understandings, made available by consulting agents and other institutions, can sell particular redevelopment schemes with the help of *“glowing write-ups”* or a sense of *“world-classness”* in ways that become *“politically powerful”* (see Temenos and McCann 2012: 1393). We follow Bunce and Desfor who note that waterfront planning and development policies, and their related discourses, might *“normalize political motivations”* (Bunce and Desfor 2007: 256). The imagined future for a repurposed, formerly industrial urban waterfront becomes a *“reality”* that is largely communicated by, and performed through, government and consultancy publications.

Thus, planning related publications are especially susceptible to reinforcing social inequalities by defining which of all the myriad possible uses of a space, and hence which user groups, are legitimate and which are not. When it comes to the production of public space in particular, the elevation of some place-narratives and the silencing of others may be especially intense. For example, Byrne and Houston demonstrate how symbolic and material representations of urban landscapes can mask colonial and racist practices. Through their case study of East Perth, Australia, they stress how the redevelopment process purposefully erased racialized and marginalized peoples that characterized the place (2005). Different planning elements such as public art, selective presentation of industrial architecture, use of street naming, and narratives have been used as devices of erasure in the redevelopment. As part of the redevelopment they show how *“cultural memory operates through planning praxis [...] to sanitise the past”* (2005: 348). Unrecognized in the production of public space, some publics are made unwelcome in the use of that space.

In this research, we undertake a discourse analysis of government and consultancy publications, taking these as evidence of what is envisioned for the public space of suburban waterfronts, and paying attention to what might be missing or ignored in these visions. Media content, archival materials, local histories, related waterfront reports, maps, and other visual materials permit a deeper understanding of why and how these planning visions

are taking place. We have also conducted site visits and tours at the Squamish waterfront, and made participant observations during and after these visits.

### Suburban waterfront change in context

Urban waterfronts have always been changing; yet, in North America, urban waterfront redevelopments are often imagined as the well-known ‘iconic’ waterfront examples such as Boston and Baltimore that date from the 1970s (Bunce and Desfor 2007: 251). Declining industrial manufacturing economies led to the abandonment of industrial waterfronts in many urban cores over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The bonds between seaports and port cities, particularly in relation to their economic, institutional, and infrastructural connections have loosened (Hall 2009: 67). This structural change has freed up land in ports that often are located within, or close to, urban areas (Millsbaugh 2001; Galland and Hansen 2012: 203). New uses were found for these areas as cities adopted post-industrial service-based economies; changes in transportation and population accompanied these broad transformations (Shaw 2001: 284-287; Galland and Hansen 2012: 203; see also Fainstein 2010: 179-180).

In some cases, especially in older and inland (e.g. upriver) industrial areas, the port function disappeared from the urban region. In other cases, especially where the harbour was constrained by breakwater, bay or some other physical feature, the port function has remained in proximate tension with the urban core. But in many places, the port function may be said to have ‘regionalized’ (Hoyle 2000; Notteboom and Rodrigue 2005), a process which involves the simultaneous relocation of marine terminals towards deeper water (whether downriver or into a bay), and the suburban and ex-urban inland extension of supporting activities such as warehouses and railyards. We document here that this suburbanization of cargo handling and related industrial activity, is now being matched by a suburban extension of waterfront redevelopment. Waterfront redevelopment practices that began in the urban core have diffused to suburban areas.

The Vancouver region is no exception to this trend. In fact, Vancouver had one of the earliest examples of residential waterfront redevelopment when, in the 1970s, the False Creek industrial area was redeveloped (see Ley 2012). The waterfront redevelopment process has accelerated since the 1980s (Olds 2002) and is today viewed as an integral component of a successful revitalization formula. This is now the case both at the urban core and in suburban waterfront locations. However, unlike core urban waterfront redevelopments which typically combine multiple uses—commercial, tourist, amenity, and residential (cf Norcliffe et al. 1996), suburban waterfront redevelopments are predominantly residential. However, in many cases the new planning strategies for suburban redevelopments cite examples seen in downtown developments. Temenos and McCann note that the “*déjà vu*” experienced when reading a planning strategy is not just ones’ imagination. Various policy mobilizers, institutions, and agents work to create best practices that can be circulated (Temenos and McCann 2013: 353-354).

In our focus on suburban waterfront changes in the Vancouver region, we respond to Lees’ call for researchers to examine the inner and outer suburbs in cities. As Lees notes:

*Now that gentrification has gone mainstream, what has the impact of this been on lifestyles in the inner and outer suburbs, indeed the exurbs and rural areas? We need much more comparative research into the differences and similarities between these different spaces in cities around the world. We can no longer compare the gentrified inner city with the modern suburb, for suburbia itself has changed!* (Lees 2014: 36)

Lees argues that the “new” middle classes are often prioritized in government decisions and policy-making, at the expense and active displacement of other groups in urban spaces (Lees 2014; see also Ley 1996).

### Public space and the suburban waterfront

Contemporary understandings around urban public space have changed considerably since the 1960s when scholars first started to pay more attention to how spaces are produced and experienced (Schmidt and Németh 2010: 453). Further, Kevin Lynch (1960) and Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that the built environment helps shape human behavior, and such urban theorists “*produced an unprecedented interdisciplinary interest in critically examining the role of power, race, gender, identity and representation in public space*” (Schmidt and Németh 2010: 453). The growing interest in landscape signaled a new attention to power relations, property, and “ways of

seeing,” among other things, that made approaches to public space scholarship increasingly multidisciplinary (see Cosgrove 1985).

Nevertheless *“the common perception of public space remains largely uncontested”* in that public spaces are often seen as unambiguously positive (Schmidt and Németh 2010: 454). However, *“[t]he traditional functions of parks, plazas, sidewalks and atria are frequently challenged by new trends in public space provision and management,”* and such trends are becoming increasingly evident (Schmidt and Németh 2010: 454). These types of changes are deeply related to social justice in the city. For example, Wolch et al. note that even though new green spaces can make neighbourhoods healthier and more attractive, they may also increase property values and housing costs, which may lead to further inequality and displacement of certain groups (Wolch et al. 2014). Furthermore, public space has become more privatized, security has increased, and consumption-oriented environments are becoming more common. Some groups, such as children, youth, low-income and the homeless, are discouraged from using many public spaces, even as more and more spaces are being “discovered” and “reclaimed” for new purposes (Schmidt and Németh 2010: 454-455; Turner 2002).

When scholars such as Jane Jacobs (1961) mention urban public space, they are often referencing plazas, parklets and squares in city centers. Urban public space takes on a different meaning when applied to suburban spaces. This observation is significant because suburban spaces in the North American context are more typically regarded as a domain of private residence; suburbs are imagined as lacking any appreciable public realm. However, in the case of suburban waterfront developments in greater Vancouver, the plans we observed often contain detailed maps and drawings of waterfront parks and trails on lands that were previously industrial, vacant, or unstructured and/or un-programmed green spaces (see City of Port Moody 2017, Council Agenda, Item, 9.2; Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017; East Fraser Lands 2006; Pitt Meadows 2009; Queensborough Community Plan 2013).

For example, a plan for Squamish contains a sketch of a renewed waterfront with a boardwalk, neatly assigned tree and bush plantings, and railings that mark the division between the water and the land (Squamish 2010: 51). Similarly, the Pitt Meadows official community plan contains a land use map with a very narrow park along the waterfront (Pitt Meadows 2007: 214), while the Queensborough plan proposes a narrow green dyke-topping perimeter trail which draws a sharp line between the new residential area and the Fraser River (Queensborough Community Plan 2013: 124). The Port Moody proposal shows evenly spaced plantings in rows that follow residential development along the waterfront (City of Port Moody 2017, Council Agenda, Item, 9.2: attachment 2). On the surface then, suburban waterfront redevelopment apparently entails the insertion of public space into the landscape; in practice, the developments which follow these plans are often substantively less ‘public’, as we argue below.

In identifying such regularized ‘public spaces’, planning documents reference contemporary planning discourses to win public support and formal approval. In these suburban waterfront cases, sustainability, livability, resilience and related discourses are used, as Lang and Rothenberg assert, to *“strengthen the ideology of growth as an optimistic, value-free public good the benefits of which trickle down to the wider community”* (2016: 5). The cases observed in this research suggest ongoing dramatic changes for suburban waterfronts. Colonization and the displacement of Indigenous peoples from the land opened up waterfront lands in the Vancouver region for industry (Barman 2007); such earlier industrial practices also allowed recreational uses for settlers. As industry restructured and relocated, residential areas of a certain type and for certain classes became the norm in Vancouver’s downtown core, and waterfront land use became more specific (see Ley 2012). These changes in use and access to waterfront public spaces continue, now even in suburban/small town areas in the Vancouver region. The discourses deployed in planning materials imply they are free from messy social and political complications; they are not. By clarifying that some uses and users are welcome, plans also communicate that other uses and users are unwelcome.

### Squamish waterfront redevelopment

The District of Squamish is located halfway between metropolitan core of Vancouver and the resort town of Whistler in British Columbia, Canada. It is situated in a valley where five rivers (the Squamish, Mamquam, Cheakamus, Stawamus, and Cheekye) meet at the northern end of Howe Sound on the Pacific Ocean (Squamish OCP 2009: 15). According to Doreen Armitage, *“[a]rcheologists [...] have dated native occupation there from as long as 9000 years ago”* (Armitage 2001: 18). Although this area lies beyond the commute-defined Vancouver

Census Metropolitan Area, housing prices and improved highway connections have increasingly incorporated Squamish within the functional metropolitan region; at the time of writing, Squamish is at the leading edge of greater Vancouver's suburban waterfront transformation.

Logging was one of the earliest industries in the area, and it drastically changed a landscape that was home to Indigenous peoples (Armitage 2001: 45; see also Figure 1). A railway connection from Squamish to Vancouver was completed in 1956, and Highway 99 was opened a few years after. Whistler began to develop into a major tourist destination in the 1970s. 30 years later, improvements were made to Highway 99 in conjunction with the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympics (Squamish, OCP 2009: 16). Highway 99, also called the “*Sea to Sky*” highway, runs directly through the territory of the Skwxwú7mesh, or Squamish peoples, one of the Coast Salish nations (Townsend-Gault 2011: S39; see figure 2). Besides being known for its unique topography, flora, and fauna, the marketing of this “cultural highway” is at the core of debates around Indigenous rights and representations of Canada (Townsend-Gault 2011: S39).

Downturns in forestry and related resource sectors have negatively affected the local economy. Fears of factory closures have been in the air in Squamish since the 1980s, and council members and residents have expressed continuous concern around the future of the town ever since (see Bridge 2007). Difficult events included the closing of Nexen Inc. (formerly Canadian Occidental Petroleum Ltd.) in 1991, followed by significant mill closures: Interfor was shut down in 2003 eliminating 117 jobs, and Woodfibre closed in 2006 leaving over 300 people unemployed (Bridge 2007). A rail maintenance yard was also downsized when BC rail was leased to CN rail in 2004 (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 12), causing 80 maintenance workers to be laid off (Bridge 2007). The closure of industrial facilities also negatively affected local government's property tax revenues (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 12).



Figure 1: Booming Grounds, Squamish, BC., 1968. (Royal BC Museum, Item I-22267).

These stressed economic circumstances influenced discussions around a waterfront development that promised a new opportunity for Squamish. Squamish has long been known for its industrial character—an image the town has more recently tried to shake off (Bridge 2007). The waterfront development area is located on the formerly industrial site of Nexen Inc. The District of Squamish (i.e. the municipal / local government) acquired the site, which was next to downtown, in 2004 (Lazarus 2004; Squamish Oceanfront Development 2018b). The 1991 plant closing had been followed by a site cleanup project, and there was reportedly excitement around how waterfront redevelopment could change the town's future (Lazarus 2004). One touted benefit was waterfront access which had been limited by industrial operations.

An early concept plan was created in 2004 through engagement with different levels of government, including First Nations, and with business and civil society interests in mind (Fraser Basin Council 2005: 24). The plan introduced “*sustainability and 'smart growth' principles to stimulate creative ideas*” (Fraser Basin Council 2005: 24), and it was part of the basis for the creation of the Squamish Oceanfront Development Corporation (SODC) (Fraser Basin Council 2005: 24). The District of Squamish has managed planning of the site since the early 2000s through the SODC (District of Squamish 2018b) and has made it an integral part of municipal and regional planning. As such, community members have been able to engage with waterfront development through these planning processes (see Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 15).

The 2004 plan outlined ways to “*revitalize the downtown waterfront into a funky, low-rise development with seaside character—a Squamish version of Vancouver's highly successful Granville Island.*” (Lazarus 2004). These ideas were bolstered due to excitement around the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver/Whistler (see Lazarus 2004). Ian Sutherland, who was the mayor of the District at the time, was enthusiastic about the waterfront and commented in the media that: “*It's a huge piece of property. [...] We are looking at taking advantage of the visibility that 2010 will bring to the area*” (Lazarus 2004). Later, in a 2010 vision for the waterfront, it was noted that “*Some of the world's' most iconic and admired communities—the most raw, innovative and real—are industry towns reinvented.*” (Squamish 2010: 9). Here the waterfront was being rebranded to reshape the image of the town and influence local identities (see Sager 2011: 157).

During the redevelopment process, plans imagined specific purposes for the waterfront's public space. For example, while encouraging public access to the waterfront (Squamish 2010: 16) the 2010 plan noted that:

*The Parks and Public Spaces will be the defining character in this community and, are destined to become Squamish's most treasured public amenities. They are the destinations for families to spend a summer's day and the place for residents to come for a tranquil stroll, enjoy a picnic on the beach or participate in a unique festival or concert [...] Open spaces blend into tree-lined walkways that lead to the Oceanfront Park and Beach, the Pier, the Lands' End Monument and the Oceanfront Walkway, which encircles and connects the entire Oceanfront community.* (Squamish 2010: 27).

The quote is significant, because while public space is included in the redevelopment, here specific uses are presented for that public space. Families can spend a day or residents can enjoy a picnic, but it is left unstated whether non-resident non-family users will be welcome. Public spaces are considered in relation to walkways, but how the public might access the water is not mentioned. Likewise, activities other than those listed are not encouraged. Here, the waterfront is meant for *viewing* the landscape rather than for accessing the water.

Despite these ideas and plans, no construction has occurred on the site by 2018, more than a decade after the local government acquired it. Instead, the public has been able to access the waterfront for a variety of unprogrammed uses. This access was previously not possible due to the industrial operations. However, these public space uses are planned to change in the near future. The District of Squamish sold the waterfront lands it managed through SODC in 2016 to Newport Beach Developments Limited Partnership, a partnership between local development company Bethel Lands Corporation and Texas-headquartered Matthews Southwest (District of Squamish 2018a). The other landowners are BCR Properties Ltd. and Mamquam Ocean Channel Developments Ltd. (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 14). The deal included \$15 million in cash and construction of a park (estimated at \$10 million), a wind sports beach, sailing centre, public walkway on the perimeter, public art and more (District of Squamish 2018a).

The new landowner asserts that they are excited about the development and about “[H]aving the ability to transform this piece... into maybe the epicentre of the town” as John Matthews, Newport Beach partner, said in an interview to a local newspaper (Thuncher 2018). The new plan for the Squamish waterfront consists of a master

planned entity that is 80.5 acres in size on a waterfront peninsula (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 14; figure 2). In relation to the District of Squamish the waterfront development should be considered as large; it aims to have a population around 6,500 residents (District of Squamish 2018b) in a town that currently has around 19,500 people (Statistics Canada 2017). The peninsula is centrally located just to the south of downtown Squamish (see Figure 2). It is situated between two narrow streams. To the east, facing the Sea-to-Sky Highway, is a large logging site with logs situated in the water, and to the west is Squamish Terminals, a deep-water cargo terminal that has been located in Squamish since 1972. This terminal imports and exports cargo such as forest and steel products, trailers, turbines, and yachts (Squamish Terminals Ltd. 2012).



Figure 2. “Oceanfront” waterfront development site in Squamish (Google Maps 2018).

Based on our site observations in 2018, the waterfront is open for people to access by car, walking or biking. Signs give information about the upcoming development. The area is used as an open outdoor space for various activities both on the land and water. While the early plans had envisioned the waterfront to have “*parks, hotels, businesses, and living space*” for the Olympics in 2010 (Ogilvie 2004) the site has remained unbuilt but informally used. This has allowed the public to access the waterfront, and many enjoy the visual landscape, soundscape, and “*salt air,*” of the waterfront. Here, people can, for example, walk their pets off-leash, access that some are concerned about losing along with the new development (Gracie 2016). The area is marked by the presence of logs in the water and it has an industrial character, due to the industrial facilities surrounding the peninsula on two sides, and the remaining industrial architecture still existing on site (see Figure 2, 3). Visitors to the site will also hear the sounds from the nearby terminals and logging trucks, as well as Sea-to-Sky highway traffic in the distance.

Upon redevelopment, and in anticipation of sea levels rising, the entire peninsula site will be raised three metres using clean soil, a condition that will change the everyday experience of those who now use the waterfront (Thuncher 2018). This means that the site will be much higher in elevation and recognizably distinct from the adjacent downtown and surrounding residential areas (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Squamish waterfront, September 3, 2016.



Figure 4: Housing near the waterfront site in Squamish. September 3, 2016.

Dual anxieties of economic decline and population growth have shaped the planning of the waterfront in Squamish, informing planning discourses and policies that aim to bring both more business and (affordable) housing development to the town. Despite the ongoing challenges in the resource sector and the lack of progress with redevelopment of the waterfront site in the decade after the District took ownership, the town's population has grown. Between the 2006 and 2016 census years, the population of the District increased by 30.5% from 14,949 to 19,512, more than double the rate of increase in the Province of British Columbia of 13% (Statistics Canada 2012 and 2017).

Background documentation for the current community plan lists challenges such as the fear of “[b]ecoming a ‘bedroom’ or ‘commuter’ community” (Squamish, Background paper 3 of 9: 2). The Community Profile introduces the new waterfront project as the “[l]argest development opportunity in the region” (Squamish Community Profile 2016: 54), and various municipal documents enthusiastically highlight the economic potential of development as it “makes money and minimizes risk” (see Squamish Community Profile 2016: 54, 55; Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 116). According to the District of Squamish (2018a), waterfront development has become the “community dream”. However, the new developer, Newport Beach, appears set on building a successful waterfront by attracting people outside of Squamish to be “the innovative minds of those who call it home” (Newport Beach Developments 2017). For example, the new plan highlights how “ocean and views” are “crucial competitive attributes if Squamish is going to be successful in attracting more professional, creative and knowledge class workers” (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 35; emphasis ours). The new waterfront plan aims to create ideal circumstances for new employers, as the plan talks about creating “[a] montage of industries from light manufacturers, to entrepreneurs, to creatives” (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 27). However, the plan provides no certainty that new employment will occur over the long term.

While the developers are trying to attract new residents from elsewhere, the community living in Squamish is struggling with the same problems of housing affordability that are affecting communities across the Vancouver region. According to Squamish mayor Patricia Heintzman, the high prices in the Vancouver region have influenced Squamish real estate and “[c]ertainly pushed up our housing prices here” (CBC News 2018). The recent community plan notes that the community is under “[a]ffordability, labour and infrastructure pressures” (Squamish 2017: 134). Affordability is nevertheless not a new issue in Squamish. For example, a media story noted in 2007 that the average sale price of single-family homes in Squamish moved from \$214,000 (2000) to \$424,000 (2006) while townhouses more than doubled in value in those years (Bridge 2007). Of particular note, low to moderate-income residents and vulnerable populations are affected the most by growing unaffordability (Squamish 2017: 67). However, there is no affordable housing planned for the waterfront site.

The waterfront plan describes how public spaces “will be the defining character in this community” (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 27). Public spaces will be located, for example, around the planned Village Centre on the tip of the peninsula (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: Schedule “AC”), which will provide “retail, service, entertainment, cultural, marine, civic and tourism accommodation” as well as “commercial uses [...] at grade facing all public spaces” (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 33). The plan also introduces a continuous waterfront pathway which will “facilitate and enhance public access to and views along the Mamquam Blind Channel for recreational, aesthetic and economic purposes” (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017:116, emphasis ours).

These waterfront uses are in line with what Bjerkeset and Aspen (2017: 127) list as common characteristics of private-public spaces in the US and UK, which entail strong emphasis on physical and visual order as well as on safe and clean environments that are highly controlled and organized. The plans for waterfront public space in Squamish anticipate behavior from waterfront users in a setting that is oriented towards recreational and consumption purposes. The trail on the waterfront allows the public to walk by the new development sites, but it does not, for example, encourage people to casually spend time on the waterfront. The new development aims to appeal to new businesses and residents alike, while at the same time, a recent local newspaper article raised the question of “Why and where are Squamishers going?” due to rising property prices and a declining economy (Jurek 2017). As new residents become more central to the imagined public space of the waterfront, contemporary development elides locally embedded cultural histories, traditions, activities, and identities of this formerly industrial waterfront area.

Further, Indigenous traditions and activities are barely discussed in relation to the waterfront's new public space in these consultancy publications (see e.g. Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017). Local industrial

histories, and the area's connection to the rest of the town of Squamish, are ignored. Further, only passing reference is made to the area's toxic past or indeed the clean-up that has made a significant improvement in the area's environment. Perhaps this is due to fears of depressing real estate values? But in future, who will know that a chlor-alkali plant operated on the waterfront from the late 1960s to 1991; that it produced chemicals for the lumber industry, which caused hazardous levels of mercury to accumulate in the environment; or that the operation to clean up the land took four years and cost \$40 million (Ministry of Environment 2009)?

Another aspect of the Oceanfront plan is that almost everything on the waterfront site will be built at once in an attempt at a "fresh start"; this is a waterfront once animated by industry and recreation, now rendered a greenfield much like other suburban development. The plans repeatedly refer to the area as being "complete" once construction is done (see e.g. Squamish 2010: 16). This indicates an attempt by planners and consultants to produce rational, coherent documentation, which further shapes planning discourses and decisions towards a particular imagined result. As such, the reframing of the Squamish waterfront references recreation, nature and other signifiers of the post-industrial economy to the exclusion of all else. New amenities, walkways, and denser built environments are being planned and built in ways that will dominate the waterfront space.

Such changes may homogenize an area or disconnect it from its surroundings (see Berman 2006: 1). The local industrial character of the town of Squamish, older people, people of colour, and the influence of waterfront developments on existing residents is rarely, if at all, discussed in relation to the new public spaces on the waterfront. As these planning, government and consultancy publications aim for economic growth in the area in the form of primarily residential development, it becomes apparent that the uses and users of the waterfront's public space are destined to become more restricted.

### Waterfront redevelopments across the greater Vancouver region

In the following, we will reflect on the Squamish redevelopment project within a regional context of contemporary suburban waterfront redevelopment and associated public space formation. As residential development has become an increasingly valued method of redevelopment, former uses of working and living on the waterfront have become harder to see. Waterfronts away from the Vancouver core are increasingly transforming into residential districts (see CBC News 2018). And while waterfront lands are rapidly changing around the City of Vancouver, it is important to keep in mind that the waterfront's current rediscovery for recreational and residential purposes is a relatively recent phenomenon (Hall 2012: 224); particularly considering the many thousands of years of Indigenous occupation of these lands. Indeed, First Nations communities were crowded into non-industrial waterfront reserves that were not, until recently, deemed desirable by settlers (Barman 2007; Harris 2002).

Physical geography provides the Lower Mainland of British Columbia with hundreds of kilometers of waterfront. The coast of the Pacific Ocean and the mouth of the 1375 km long Fraser River meet in the Vancouver region a little south from Squamish. The Fraser River is ecologically sensitive, and it was significant for earlier human settlements long before colonization by the Europeans. Since the colonial era, the region's lengthy waterfront has supported multiple uses, ranging from transportation, industrial operations (such as mills and shipyards), log storage, rail access, farming, and fishing, as well as various recreational uses (see Airas et al. 2015). Further, the Fraser River and "*riverfront land have long played an important role in goods movement in western Canada; in earlier years, industrial land uses were closely connected to transport activity patterns along the river*" (Hall 2012: 223). In addition, the waterfront was a place of work for people of different ethnicities. Coast Salish, Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, and European peoples have worked in waterfront activities such as milling, farming and fishing (see Queensborough Community Plan 2013: 9-10). In particular, Indigenous labour was important to the lumber industry in the Vancouver area throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Parnaby 2006). Issues of race and class have long histories on the waterfront.

Yet it is not only in Squamish where these rich waterfront histories are being submerged. In the following we review a few selected suburban waterfront residential plans, their former uses, and the public space planning objectives from different cities in the Vancouver region. Within the limits of the City of Vancouver, an ongoing residential development on a former mill site known as the *River District* is taking place away from downtown. The City of Pitt Meadows has a residential site *Osprey Village* along the Fraser River next to the Katzie First Nation, and currently in Port Moody significant changes are planned for the *Flavelle* mill site. Residential areas are now well-established along the Fraser in New Westminster in the formerly industrial area

of *Queensborough*. Suburban waterfront redevelopment sites in the greater Vancouver area that are not listed in Table 1 include Bedford Landing in Fort Langley, Fraser Mills in Coquitlam, River Green in Richmond, and several developments around Steveston and Ladner near the mouth of the Fraser River (Figure 5 shows the general location of all these redevelopments).

Waterfront Development	Residential plans	Former uses
“River District”, Vancouver	Planned for over 15 000 residents in over 7000 residences (River District, Vancouver 2017).	The Canadian White Pine sawmill used to operate in the area until the mill closed in 2001 (East Fraser Lands 2006: 6).
“Osprey Village”, Pitt Meadows	In 2009, the area was rezoned to allow for 481 units of housing (Pitt Meadows, Council Report 2009: 27).	Wood Industry (Google Earth Historical Imagery 2018).
“Flavelle”, Port Moody	Estimated c. 3000 units (City of Port Moody 2017, Council Agenda, Item, 9.2: 2).	Sawmill industry has been operating on the site since early 20 <sup>th</sup> century (Port Moody Heritage Society 2012: 39).
Queensborough (Port Royal area and beyond), New Westminster	2521 units (year 2011), estimated number of units by 2041 is 4964 (Queensborough Community Plan 2013: 24)	Mainly industrial (including sawmills, manufacturing, boat-building) and agricultural, partly residential, e.g. in the 1930s the area had c. 1000 residents (Queensborough Community Plan 2013: 12).
“Oceanfront” Squamish	Plan is to house about 6500 residents in the next 20 years (District of Squamish 2018b).	Former site of a chlor-alkali plant that operated on the waterfront from the late 1960s to 1991 (Ministry of Environment, profiles on remediation projects 2009).

Table 1: Selected suburban waterfront development, greater Vancouver.

What is notable in the government and consultancy publications that accompany these suburban waterfront redevelopments is that they all prioritize the creation of primarily residential districts. Planning objectives around public space often refer to nature, associated health benefits, and “liveability” ideals for these new residents. Indeed, the growth-oriented objectives and statements in these plans are not substantially different from one another. Viewing the government and consultancy publications seen in Table 1 in light of the case of Squamish reveals that despite the differences the various suburban waterfront redevelopment locations may have, they take on surprisingly similar solutions when outlining their public space after the industrial uses.

For example, the planning language used to describe the proposed public space for Oceanfront, Squamish, is quite similar to that found in suburban waterfront redevelopments in Vancouver and Pitt Meadows. In suburban south Vancouver, public space is outlined in a plan for a “*riverfront edge and foreshore walk*” in the River District (East Fraser Lands 2006: 22), in a setting that will allow “*residents to live, work, learn, shop, and play*” (East Fraser Lands 2006: 18). Developments at the River District and in Squamish both profess to finding potential in commercial uses on the waterfront’s public space (East Fraser Lands 2006: 18; Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 33). In Pitt Meadows (in Osprey Village) the parks, recreational opportunities and facilities are meant to “*meet the needs of a growing and changing population*” (Pitt Meadows, Official Community Plan, 2007: 51). The City of Pitt Meadows also promotes public access “*along key waterfront lands in order to achieve a linked*

*multi-use trail system between major parks, greenbelts, dikes and other recreational features*” (Pitt Meadows, Official Community Plan, 2007: 2007: 52). This is similar to early plans for the Squamish waterfront that outlined tree-lined walkways where families could spend a day or residents could enjoy a picnic (see Squamish 2010: 27) while also appealing to *“professional, creative and knowledge class workers”* (Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: 35).



Figure 5. Suburban waterfront developments in greater Vancouver (Map was created using Google Maps 2018).

Developments in Port Moody and in New Westminister (Queensborough) also share similarities with the outlined public space for Squamish. For example, the development of the Flavelle site in Port Moody promotes *“residential presence along the water”* (City of Port Moody 2017, Council Agenda, Item, 9.2: 3) aiming to create a legacy project while *“bringing a diversity of housing, commercial, employment, and recreational options to the city and providing the community with new access to the waterfront”* (The Flavelle Oceanfront site 2017: 13). Similarly, in

Queensborough, “public features” are considered at “key points, such as waterfront lookout points, rest spots and entry gateway elements” (Queensborough Community Plan 2013: 160). The newly built residential area in Queensborough and the future Flavelle site are similar in that the residential areas dominate these waterfronts public spaces. Renewed public spaces provide opportunities to *view* the waterfront as an aesthetic benefit. Similar approaches are also outlined to take place at the Squamish development, as the now almost vacant peninsula is planned to be covered with new residential buildings, a perimeter trail and commercial activities (see Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017: Schedule AC).

Repeatedly these plans aim for “sustainability”, “uniqueness”, “economic viability”, “vitality”, and “recreation” while creating a community where residents can “live-work-shop/learn-play”. However, most of these concepts are vague and they are not well described or even defined. Nevertheless, these concepts are important, and they help to imagine and shape public space in these areas, as they get picked up in the everyday language and documentation of urban planners, developers, marketers, media and visitors to the area, among others (see MacLeod 2011: 2635; McCann 2011: 114).

Relatedly, Schweitzer notes how the academic literature often discusses concepts like sustainability, environment, and growth, but at the same time often displaces discussions about justice (Schweitzer, 2016). Hall and Stern point out that sustainability and liveability discourses in the Vancouver region often ignore the “*unfashionable aesthetics and social justice concerns of less- advantaged urban residents*” (Hall and Stern 2014: 593). This condition further advances the development of particular types of professional knowledge around public spaces that can diminish the importance of diverse publics. In the search for new investors, businesses, and people, such knowledges, concepts, and related narratives become powerful. They work as the starting point for imagining the futures of these areas, and can easily normalize particular political motivations (see Bunce and Desfor 2007: 256) with the help of “*glowing write-ups*” (see Temenos and McCann 2012: 1393). Lang and Rothenberg note that the revitalization of public spaces has “*become a critical issue in contemporary urban growth machine struggles*” (2016: 16). They note that some public space developments have been seen by residents and local businesses as projects that are “*more concerned with boosting real estate values and tourism and less about community and environmental concerns*” (2016: 6).

In the case of suburban waterfronts in the Vancouver region, the visual and textual representations within government and consultancy publications seem to suggest that land use changes on the waterfront will be painless and unproblematic. Waterfront communities become understood in the planning documents in specific ways that could be characterized, in Hern’s terms, as “flattening out subjectivities into one beige-colored ‘commonality,’ absent difference or history” (Hern 2016: 41). Such flattening inevitably converges to some unmarked, but never neutral, category. Planning documents outline waterfront redevelopments in ways that lead the reader to imagine a normalized future with working aged couples and families with similar lifestyles and consumption habits. As Lees writes “People are categorised by other people, and these categorisations influence how people identify themselves individually and collectively” (Lees 2014: 36). As such, a more complex and inclusive notion of public space as spaces for diverse publics is rendered impossible.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Waterfront sites beyond the Vancouver downtown core are changing rapidly. New, primarily residential developments are emplaced on formerly industrial sites along the Fraser River, Burrard Inlet, and all the way to Squamish. Activity on these sites used to depend on their proximity to water, road, and rail. Port operations have been moving away from the Vancouver downtown core since the 1970s, and were replaced by residential developments such as those at False Creek (see Ley 2012). Residential redevelopment has now begun taking over the region’s formerly industrial suburban waterfronts as well. The case of Squamish waterfront, along with other suburban waterfront cases in the Vancouver region, demonstrates how residential real estate has become a waterfront developmental norm, in which waterbodies are valued increasingly for their visual aesthetic benefits. Yet, not so long ago these waterbodies engaged multiple publics and purposes.

The Squamish waterfront had industrial operations for years that influenced the community’s employment and character. When the industrial operations ceased in the 1990s (Bridge 2007) Squamish began a process of “reinventing” (see Squamish 2010: 9) the waterfront’s image and identity through this site. Contemporary plans for the waterfront outline low-risk options for real estate investment that are desired by developers and municipal government. Such developments are seen as economically viable, but this comes with displacement.

The existing built environment contains industrial structures that have for years allowed for multiple uses. In the new plans, public space becomes more restricted. It becomes a newly built environment and outdoor recreational area from which to view the water, while particular aesthetic and economic purposes are meant to guide the new uses of this public space (see Squamish Oceanfront, Sub area plan 2017:116). But, leaving the waterfront's public space open for multiple, non-specified users and uses is not part of this imaginary.

Squamish plans share a resemblance with other recent waterfront plans in the Vancouver region. In the plans introduced in suburban Vancouver (River District), and in the suburban municipalities of the region, waterfronts are transformed (or are about to be transformed) from industrial to primarily residential purposes. Plans aim to attract particular types of investment and residents, while also promoting the waterfront for its aesthetic appeal. These everyday practices of planning act to categorize and give value to particular knowledge, discourses and imaginaries to guide such urban change. Planning is infused with economic pressures and political agendas, as well as the norms and values of municipal offices (such as District of Squamish), developers (such as Newport Beach Developments Limited Partnership), and real estate promoters (such as MoveToSquamish, BC 2017), among others. Contemporary developments in the region are following so-called "workable" options considered desirable by planning experts and other stakeholders. But, often in the process these "best policies" do not reflect local needs nor do they contain the elements that made them desirable in the first place (see Temenos and McCann 2013). For example, while the town of Squamish is increasingly unaffordable and many existing residents are struggling to stay in town, the new waterfront development does not include affordable housing supply as part of residential plans.

Diverse publics are eliminated as planning proceeds. In our suburban waterfront cases, while they may be referenced in documents, current or past workers, extant/past residents, young people, low-income residents, First Nations peoples, as well as other activities (such as agriculture or industrial operations) are not included in the future imagining of these suburban waterfront areas. Vague references, rather than explicit plans, leave room for stakeholders to pursue their (singular) desires for the waterfront areas.

This ongoing process means that people who do not fall into the category of "*young, educated, adventure-driven professionals*" (Newport Beach Developments 2017) are excluded from the imaginary of the suburban waterfront in Squamish, and from its public spaces. Even if the uses of the waterfront are technically available to a variety of groups, the processes of targeted marketing can easily lead to certain groups feeling unwelcome in these newly built areas. Such developments erase traditions on the waterfront while preventing future generations from learning from the past.

The case of Oceanfront in Squamish is an example of the contemporary developments that are taking residential-consumption practices of waterfront redevelopment from the urban core to the suburbs. What gets highlighted in these planning activities is that rapid and major transformations to waterfront public space that is presented as unambiguously positive and uncomplicated. What gets ignored in these selective discourses are the "*discontinuities*" (Foucault 1972: 7), the myriad of different waterfront actors, uses and legacies. Planning should instead seek a more inclusive reinvention of the waterfront, appreciation of all classes and groups, in order to create more socially sustainable public spaces (see Lees 2014).

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